

Intro to Mindfulness

Student Workbook

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Mississippi State University Student Counseling Services
(662) 325-2091
www.counseling.msstate.edu

*This workshop and its materials were adapted from
Cal Poly Counseling Services' Anxiety Toolbox and Getting Unstuck programs.*

Welcome!

Welcome to **Wellness U**! Wellness U is a collection of workshops with the ultimate goal of providing you with knowledge and skills to increase your overall well-being and meet your goals. The Wellness U Workshop Series has several parts:

- **Stress and Anxiety 101** helps participants understand the effects of stress and anxiety by learning about the fight, flight, or freeze response and the differences between motivational and unhelpful stress/anxiety. Participants will also learn a basic skill for anxiety management: grounding techniques.
- **Changing Unhelpful Thoughts** introduces participants to a cognitive behavioral strategy for challenging unhelpful thoughts. Participants will be able to identify unhelpful thinking styles, learn alternative responses to unhelpful thinking, and become more aware of their ability to challenge and change thinking patterns.
- **Intro to Wellness** introduces participants to concepts of dimensional wellness and how to increase their overall wellness.
- **Intro to Mindfulness** is all about mindfulness, its benefits, and how to practice mindfulness in day-to-day life.
- **The ABZzzzs of Sleep** helps participants improve the quantity and quality of their sleep by learning about sleep hygiene.
- **Relationships 101** introduces participants to healthy versus unhealthy relationships, ways to manage conflict, and how to set boundaries.
- **Test Anxiety** helps participants understand the components of test anxiety and introduces them to a skill to minimize the symptoms of anxiety.
- **Intro to Tai Chi** presents participants with the opportunity to learn about a traditional Chinese form of exercise which emphasizes breath and body movement and can be useful in reducing stress and anxiety as well as improving joint flexibility, stability, and muscular strength.

By the end of this series, you will have received a lot of information and, at times, it may feel overwhelming. Remember that like any skill (e.g., learning to ride a bike), the skills you will learn in **Wellness U** take time and practice to master. At times, you may encounter obstacles and/or find it difficult to integrate these skills into your daily life. That is okay, it is a normal part of the change process. As with all change, it is important to practice as much as you can, even after encountering setbacks.

Think of your practice of these skills as a form of “mental health hygiene.” At the outset, it may seem tedious and you may question why you need to practice these skills so often. Similar to brushing your teeth, daily practice prevents a buildup of stress over time. The more you practice and use these skills as part of your daily routine, the less tedious they may seem because they simply become a regular part of daily life.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Why have I been referred to Wellness U?

Our clinicians recommend participation in Wellness U after meeting with you because they think you can benefit from it. We strongly believe that if you fully engage in Wellness U and practice these skills, you will see the benefit of attending. And we have the research to back this up – since 2016, students have consistently rated these workshops as helpful. Wellness U also helps support your innate resilience by recognizing your autonomy; in other words, we know that students have the ability to address many of their concerns independently in a supportive environment. In fact, some students may get what they need from Wellness U alone. Others may benefit from Wellness U as well as other services, such as Let’s Talk (informal consultation), a support group, group therapy, or individual therapy.

What if I don’t feel comfortable in groups?

Many people feel anxious about participating in a group. Wellness U is structured and curriculum-driven, like an academic class. You are not required to speak to the entire group if you do not feel comfortable doing so. The facilitators respect each participant’s right to share only what they are comfortable sharing and never require you to share sensitive information about yourself.

What if I have an urgent need to see a clinician during Wellness U?

Simply let the facilitator or Student Counseling Services’ front desk staff know and they will facilitate you getting the help you need.

Why do you recommend practice outside of the workshop?

The focus of these workshops is on building skills; in order to achieve that goal, regular practice is essential. The more you practice, the more you may find you get out of these workshops. The assignments are for you and only you, in the service of your own personal growth. You will not be required to provide your responses at any time during this workshop; however, there will be opportunities to ask questions or share if you do feel comfortable.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is “a process of paying attention with flexibility, openness, and curiosity.” This definition tells us 3 important things:

- 1) Mindfulness is an **awareness process**, not a thinking process – it involves paying attention to your experience as opposed to being “caught up” in your thoughts
- 2) Mindfulness involves a particular attitude of **openness and curiosity** – even if your experience in this moment is difficult, painful, or unpleasant, you can be open to it and curious about it instead of running from it or fighting with it.
- 3) Mindfulness involves **flexibility of attention** – the ability to consciously direct, broaden, or focus your attention on different aspects of your experience.

How can it help?

- AWARENESS: We can practice mindfulness to “wake up,” connect with ourselves, and appreciate the fullness of life.
- SELF-KNOWLEDGE: We can use it to improve our self-knowledge – to learn more about how we feel, think, and react.
- CONNECTION: We can use it to connect deeply and intimately with the people we care about, including ourselves.
- LEARNING TO RESPOND VS. REACT: We can use it to consciously influence our own behavior and increase our range of responses to the world we live in. Mindfulness can help us choose what happens next with intention, so that instead of merely reacting to the things that happen in life, we can choose a response that is in line with our values.

Russ Harris, ACT Made Simple

Benefits of Mindfulness Meditation

Health

- Increases immune function
- Decreases pain
- Decreases inflammation at the cellular level

Happiness / Mental Health

- Increases positive emotion
- Decreases depression
- Decreases anxiety
- Decreases stress

Social Life

- Increases social connection and emotional intelligence
- Makes you more compassionate
- Makes you feel less lonely

Self-Control

- Improves your ability to regulate emotions
- Improves your ability to introspect

Changes Your Brain

- Increases gray matter
- Increases volume in areas related to emotion regulation
- Increases cortical thickness in areas related to paying attention

Productivity

- Increases your focus and attention
- Improves your ability to multitask
- Improves your memory
- Improves your ability to be creative and think outside the box

Adapted from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/feeling-it/201309/20-scientific-reasons-start-meditating-today>

Breathing Exercises

Basic Mindfulness of the Breath

I invite you to get into a comfortable position that is upright, but not rigid, with your hands in your lap or at your sides. I invite you to notice your feet on the floor. I invite you to either allow your eyes to close if you are comfortable with that or to focus on a spot on the floor in front of you.

(pause 10 seconds)

I invite you to notice that without any effort, you are already breathing. Allow yourself to continue breathing naturally. There is no special way to breathe. Just allow the breath to flow. I invite you to focus your attention on the process of breathing.

(pause 15 seconds)

As you pay attention to the breath, you are likely to notice some distracting thoughts, judgments, emotions, or body sensations. That's OK. Minds are designed to wander and think and judge. That's what they do. When that happens, I invite you to just notice that your attention has left the breath and gently return to noticing the feel of the breath as it moves in and out.

(pause 15 seconds)

You may notice your mind wandering off once or twice. Or perhaps you notice your mind wandering off over and over. That's OK. The work is not in keeping your mind from wandering off. It is in noticing that your mind wandered off and returning to the breath.

(pause 25 seconds)

Now, as we end this exercise, I invite you to return to your regular state of awareness. For the last few minutes, we focused on one part of your experience – the breath. I invite you to open your awareness to all of your experience in this moment. Perhaps open your eyes and take a look around you, check in with your hearing, your senses of touch, taste and smell.

Belly (or Diaphragmatic) Breathing

You can do this exercise in any position, but it is helpful to do this exercise while lying down when first learning belly breathing.

1. Lie comfortably on your back, with a pillow under your head, your knees bent and your back flat. You can stretch your legs out if that's more comfortable.
2. Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your upper chest.
3. Inhale slowly and expand your belly as you breathe so that your lower hand moves with your belly. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.
4. Slowly exhale, focusing on the movement of your belly and lower hand as it returns to its original position.
5. Repeat steps 3 & 4 for several minutes, always focusing on the movement of the belly as you breathe. If your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to your breathing.

Breath-Counting Exercise

This exercise focuses on the use of counting with the rhythm of the breath. Start with a short period of time and gradually increase the time. Set a timer so that you do not have to worry about when to stop.

1. Find a comfortable position. Take several deep breaths and settle into yourself. You may either close your eyes or keep them open, depending on your own comfort. If you keep them open, fix them on an object or a spot on the floor about four feet in front of you. Your eyes may be either focused or unfocused.
2. Take deep, comfortable breaths. Notice your inhalation. The pause between inhaling and exhaling, your exhalation, and the pause before starting again.
3. As you inhale, count, “one...” As you exhale, count, “two...” Inhale, “three...” Exhale, “four...” Continue until you reach 10 then start over.
4. If you lose count, simply begin with “one” on your next inhalation.
5. If you notice your mind has wandered, gently notice this, and return your focus back to counting your breath.
6. If you notice any body sensations catching your attention, focus on that sensation until it fades. Then return your attention back to counting your breaths.

Basic Guided Mindfulness Meditation Script

To begin this meditation, find a comfortable position to sit. The most important thing with regard to sitting during meditation is that you are sitting up straight enough for you to have full access to your lungs. When you are slumped over, you can't breathe fully.

Start with the eyes open and facing forward with a soft gaze. Not necessarily staring, but just becoming aware of the environment as you start to take some deep breaths – in through the nose and out through the mouth.

Become aware of the peripheral vision – above, below, and to the sides – just becoming aware of what the environment looks like. As you breathe in, feel your lungs filling with air and as you breathe out feeling the muscles in your body relax.

Continue breathing for 1 minute

On your next out breath, slowly close your eyes. Allow your breath to return to a natural rhythm – in and out through the nose. As you close your eyes, feel your body pressing down against the chair.

Continue breathing for several seconds

Become aware of your feet below you, heels placed softly on the floor

Be aware of your feet for several seconds

Feel your hands and arms rested softly on your lap.

Feel your hands and arms for several seconds

Move your attention and become aware of the sounds in the room - and the sounds outside. Those close and those further away. Not judging it or trying to ignore them. Often times, we view sounds as a distraction but with this exercise, use them as a way of grounding yourself in the present moment.

Pay attention to sounds for several seconds

Become aware of your general mood / feeling in your body. Is there a heaviness or lightness to your body?

Be aware of your body for several seconds

Body Scan

Beginning at the top of your head and moving down to the bottom of your feet, slowly but steadily scan your body. Become aware of any tension or any relaxation – in each part of your body. Not judging it, not trying to change anything but just becoming aware and accepting it for what it is and moving along.

At this point, it is common for the mind to wander – for random thoughts or images to come up. That's completely OK. Instead of trying to force those thoughts away, simply recognize them for what they are, accept the distractions, and watch them as they pass like a cloud in the sky. The harder we try to force things, often times, they stronger they become.

Body Scan should take about 1 minute

Focus on the Breath

Bring your focus back to your breath. Notice where in your body you feel the breath – it may be in the chest, the stomach, the diaphragm, maybe even in the shoulders. Notice how each breath is different than the last – some may be shorter than others, some deeper. Even notice the gentle rise and fall of the body as you breathe.

Focus on your breath for 30 seconds

To help with this focus, begin counting your breaths. One for your inhalation, 2 for your exhalation, 3 in.... all the way to a count of 10 and when you get to 10 you can start back at 1.

It's natural to lose focus. Instead of beating yourself up, you can just recognize and accept the distraction and start back where you left off.

Count breaths for 4 minutes

Conclusion

For the next 10 or 15 seconds, lose all focus. You don't even need to focus on your breath. If your mind wants to think, let it think. If it wants to wander, let it wander.

Let go for about 15 seconds

Bring your focus back to your body – the feelings of sitting, your feet and legs below you, and your hands / arm rested on your lap. Allow the sounds around you back into your awareness – those close and those further away. Just bring your mind back to the present moment.

When you are ready you can slowly open your eyes and, before you start moving, take a moment to pause and really be aware of what it feels like to give yourself just a few minutes of the day to be fully present and mindful.

You can stretch if you'd like, move around, and get yourself ready to get back to your day.

Ways to Practice Mindfulness Informally

When we practice mindfulness in a more informal way we are noticing our experience from moment to moment and bringing our attention to one thing as many times as we can throughout the day. Informal practices of mindfulness can include:

Washing dishes: Notice the water and feel the sensation of the warmth, the bubbles and your hands on the dishes. Slow your movements down and pause for a moment and pay attention to each piece you're washing.

Noticing nature: Listen to the sounds of the birds, the frogs or the leaves rustling in the trees as you walk by. If you live in the city, listen to the sounds of cars going by or the voices of people as they walk by your window.

Listening: Listen deeply to people in your life with an open heart and mind. Practice not giving advice and just listen and allow people to be where they are. Listen with gentle, open focus on the laughter of people you care about.

Showering: Feel the sensations and warmth of the water. Listen to the sound of the spray of the water around you. Notice your thoughts and feelings as you take in the entire experience of the shower.

Driving: Pay attention with focused attention on what you see, the feel of the steering wheel in your hands and what you're hearing around you. Relax your shoulders and notice what you're feeling and experiencing as you mindfully drive.

Movement: While walking out of your home, going into your workplace, walking up the stairs or during any other movement throughout your day, bring your focus to the sensations in your body.

Self-Compassion: Notice when you're being harsh and judgmental with yourself and guide your thoughts toward self-compassion.

Breathing: Your breath is always with you and you don't need a formal practice to benefit from breath awareness. Pausing at any time throughout our day to connect to our breath and noticing ourselves inhaling and exhaling is an important part of informal as well as formal mindfulness practice.

From

https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/your_mindfulness_practice_can_be_formal_or_informal

Online Resources

Cal Poly SLO Counseling Services - Guided Meditations

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI44jVzqiSNuYrPNPWHc6BTqrwBXtlhrS>

Meditation Oasis

www.meditationoasis.com

Mindful

www.mindful.org

Mindfulness Research Guide

<http://www.mindfulexperience.org/>

UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center- Guided Meditations

<http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22>

Apps for your Smartphone, Tablet, or Computer

Headspace

Smiling Mind

iMindfulness

Breathing techniques by Hemalayaa

Calm

CBTi-Coach

Mindfulness Coach

Mindshift

Stop, Breathe & Think

Take a break

Books for Further Reading

The Mindful Way Workbook (Teasdale, Williams, Segal, & Kabat-Zinn)

The Mindfulness Workbook: A Teach Yourself Guide (Langley)

The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook (Davis, Robbins, Eshelman & McKay)

Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love & Wisdom (Rick Hanson)

Wherever You Go, There You Are (Jon Kabat-Zinn)

The Miracle of Mindfulness (Thích Nhất Hạnh)